

Ashlawn  
Simeon  
Albemarle County  
Virginia

HABS No. VA-1017

HABS  
VA,  
2-Sim,  
1-

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D. C. 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

ASHLAWN

HABS No. VA-1017

HABS  
VA  
2-SIM,  
1 -

Location: Simeon, Albemarle County, Virginia

Present Owner: The College of William and Mary

Present Status: Under restoration, but open to the public,  
as a Virginia Historic Landmark

Present Condition: Excellent

Statement of Significance: Ashlawn, known as the home of James Monroe, fifth president of the United States, was situated on 3500 acres adjacent to Monticello on Carter's Mountain when Monroe purchased it in 1793. Monroe labored intermittently on his "cabin castle" for more than 30 years until he was forced to sell it to pay off debts in 1825. At that time, the plantation was known as "The Highlands" and was not until after Monroe's death in 1831 that it became known as Ashlawn. After Monroe's death, substantial additions were made, and in 1930 Jay Johns began restoring the original portions and opened it to the public. Presently the house and surrounding acreage is owned by the College of William and Mary, which maintains it and continues the restoration efforts.

PART I: HISTORICAL INFORMATION

## Chain of Title.

Location of Records: Transfers Reference Deed Books (DB) or Will Books (WB), by book number and page. Records are located in the Records Room of the Clerk of the Court, Albemarle County Courthouse, Charlottesville, Virginia.

1 September, 1793. DB 11-163, County of Albemarle.

To: James Monroe

From: Champe Carter

"...a certain tract or parcel of land, situated, lying, and being in the said County of Albemarle... and bounded as followeth, to wit,...on the South by a run...and thence to the source of said run and thence in a straight line to the top of the Southeast Mountains, North to the lands of Mr. Jefferson and thence by the road north to the beginning."

7 February, 1822 through 1 January, 1825. DB 22-488

To: R. Smith, Trustee

From: James Monroe

Acreage and improvements are put in a trust as Monroe assumes Presidency.

1 January, 1825. DB 27-264

To: Edward O. Goodwyn

From: James Monroe

Elizabeth Monroe

"...one certain tract or parcel of land lying and being in the County of Albemarle, it being part of that tract belonging to the said Monroe and known by the name Highlands, containing by a survey...907 acres."

3 May 1834. DB 31-428

To: Bernard H. Buckner

From: Edward O. Goodwyn

"...all that tract, piece or parcel of land lying in the County of Albemarle in the State of Virginia on the East side of Southwest Mountain... containing six hundred acres more or less, together with all buildings, improvements, rights privileges, etc."

21 September, 1837 DB 35-237

To: Alexander Garrett

From: Bernard H. Buckner

"...a tract or parcel of land containing approximately 600 acres, lying and being in the County of Albemarle on the East side of the South West Mountain."

10 January, 1850 DB 49-38

To: Thomas T. Pretlow and Clarisa Pretlow

From: Alexander Garrett

"...a certain tract or parcel of land lying and being in the said County of Albemarle on the Southeast side of the Southwest Mountain, and containing approximately 605 1/16 acres."

25 February 1857 DB 58-196

To: George M. Bowen

From: Thomas T. Pretlow and Clara Pretlow

"...a certain tract or parcel of land lying and being in the County of Albemarle, Virginia called Ashlawn, containing by estimation 672 9/16 acres..."

18 January, 1867 DB 62-276

To: John E. Massey

From: George M. Bowen

"...two certain tracts or parcels of land lying and being in the County of Albemarle, Virginia, one of them containing 535 acres, the other containing 95 acres."

13 April, 1872 DB 67-129

To: Joseph T. Massey

From: John E. Massey

"...three certain tracts of land...lying in the "Flat Woods" adjoining the lands of Sneed, Rogers, and others, the third containing 10 acres, being the same land conveyed to Massey by Benjamin Sneed on 5 January, 1869."

10 March, 1879 DB 86-475

To: John E. Massey

From: Joseph T. Massey

" All the property, both real and personal lying and being in the County of Albemarle, Virginia which was conveyed to him...by his said brother John E. Massey by Deed of Bargain and Sale dated 13 April, 1872."

21 May, 1901 WB 31-2 Albemarle County, Virginia

To: W.W. Massey and Mary H. Massey

From: John E. Massey

"12. It is my desire that my son W.W. Massey take my farm, Ashlawn...at a fair valuation and pay to his sister 1/2 of its valuation."

24 January, 1930 DB 207-452

To: Jay W. Johns

From: Mary H. Massey

"...all those two certain tracts or parcels of land about 4 miles from Charlottesville in Albemarle County, Virginia known as Ashlawn containing the aggregate 630 acres."

1 February, 1936 DB 231-81

To: Helen L. Johns

From: Jay W. Johns

"That for and in consideration of natural love and affection and \$1.00, Jay W. Johns grants, bargains, sells, and conveys unto Helen L. Johns, a joint life estate with himself...in all that certain tract of land with improvements thereon situated about 4 miles Southeast of Charlottesville in Albemarle County, Virginia known as Ashlawn."

31 December, 1970 WB 52-008

To: The College of William and Mary

From: Jay W. Johns

"Seventh: I give, devise, and bequeath to the College of William and Mary of Virginia, a non-profit agency of the Commonwealth of Virginia, for its educational purposes, my property in Albemarle County, Virginia, known as Ashlawn, the home of President James Monroe... It is my desire that the college will continue to operate the property as a historic shrine for the education of the general public."

### Historical Description:

James Monroe originally settled in Albemarle County in 1789. At that time he purchased the property presently called Monroe Hill on the University of Virginia grounds. The relative unproductivity of this farm site combined with his desire to be closer to his friend Thomas Jefferson prompted Monroe to buy a tract of land in 1793 on the east side of Carter's Mountain.

It was on this site that the original cottage Highlands was built.<sup>1</sup> Monroe lived at Highlands until the termination of his presidency. At that time all of his property holdings in Albemarle County were transferred or sold to the United States Bank for payment of debts. In 1825, Monroe sold Highlands and in that same year he acquired property in Loudon County where he built Oak Hill. He lived at Oak Hill until his death on July 4, 1831.

After Monroe relinquished Highlands the property changed hands several times before it was purchased by John E. Massey in 1867. It was Massey who constructed the two story addition to the east of the original cottage. The house was sold to Jay Johns in 1930. Johns willed the structure and the adjoining property to the College of William and Mary in 1970. Ash Lawn is now operated by the College as an historic house museum open to the public.

### Physical History:

During the years following his residence, James Monroe's cottage had been extensively altered and enlarged. Based on both the physical and documentary evidence six major building phases can be defined.<sup>2</sup> (Note: Rather than establishing a fixed date for these alterations an attempt has been made to place the changes in a framework that coincides with the occupancies of the various owners.)

Phase 1: Monroe's original cottage was probably two rooms with a basement. Presently these rooms are the master bedroom and the dining room. Their dimensions (17'2"x12'6" and 17'2"x12'4") are nearly identical to the overall measurements listed in the 1800 Mutual Assurance Policy for Highlands.)

There is some question as to whether or not the central fireplace was present at this time. There is evidence that the attic rafters have been cut to allow the chimney to pass through the roof. In addition the east wall in the southwest basement room appears to have been altered so that the fireplace could be installed. If the central chimney was not present, there is a possibility that there could have been exterior end chimneys on the east and west elevations.

Physical History(cont.):

Phase 2: Construction of the north and south porches was probably completed at this time. It is thought that the main entrance to the cottage was on the north elevation. While this would be a unique feature for Virginia, entering from the south through the complex of outbuildings and slave quarters would have been most unlikely.

Phase 3: Even though the 1800 Assurance Policy states that a 30'x40' wing was built to the east, the validity of such an entry is questionable. It is more plausible that the wing was planned at the time of the policy, and not completed until 1809-1810.<sup>4</sup> It would seem to be a tremendous undertaking to construct the wing within one year of the completion of the original cottage. While the framing at the junction of the original structure and the wing consists of a double sillplate (one going to each of the rooms) and there are end outriggers that supported the original exterior cornice, the entire system was replaced late in the nineteenth century. This factor precludes being able to make a definite date based on material evidence.

By 1816 the north porch was either enclosed or rebuilt to form the lean-to addition. The house now has the basic configuration found in Mutual Assurance Policy no. 2270.<sup>5</sup> The appearance of cornice molding along the south wall of the northern addition supports this claim. This molding has the profile of an exterior crown molding and soffit that probably dates from the late eighteenth century. Furthermore, while the roof over this section was reframed in the 1890's, the location of the system confirms the later date of the wing.

Phase 4: During the time Monroe was president the larger wing either fell into disrepair or it was partially destroyed by fire. (There is no evidence of fire, yet any charred rafters would have been replaced during subsequent renovations.) Both the parlor and the small room to the north west of the parlor date from this period. These rooms are either remains from the 30'x40' wing or they were rebuilt from salvaged materials. The latter case appears to be the most accurate. While the original structure had a brick foundation, the basement walls under this section are now fieldstone. Furthermore, the large rubble stone fireplace was probably installed at this time to service the newly created sitting room. Finally, these two rooms share common window and door moldings that date from the earliest known construction period.

The southwest corner of the south porch was probably enclosed during the occupancy of the Garret family.

Physical History(cont.):

Phase 5: The period of the Massey occupancy witnessed the greatest changes to the house. It was at this time that the two story east wing was added.

The northern lean-to addition was extended  $\approx 18''$  during this period. Massey probably made this change so that the original section of the house would be symmetrically on line with the new wing. The evidence to confirm this alteration is as follows: 1. change in both the type and direction of the floor boards in this area; 2. late detailing of the fireplace closets, and; 3. remmanants of the original brick north wall where it was joined to the west chimney foundation.

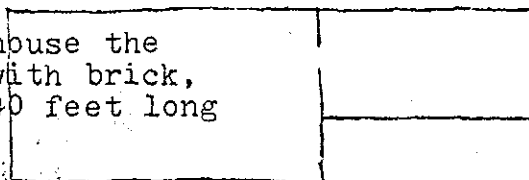
Further alterations during this period include the rearrangement of the window configuration on the west elevation and the addition of a new roof which replaced the broken line of the lean-to, with an uninterrupted gable line.

Phase 6: Twentieth century work on the house includes the addition of the one story portico on the north elevation, the regrading and present landscaping of the site and considerable interior modifications to enable the house to operate as a museum.

FOOTNOTES

1. Monroe always referred to his property on Carter's Mountain as the Highlands or as the Upper Plantation. The parcel of land at the University was known as the lower plantation. The name Ash Lawn came into use during the late nineteenth or early twentieth century.
2. See measured drawing no.9, page 20.
3. Mutual Assurance Policy #386: August 1800

Wooden dwelling house the walls filled in with brick, one story high, 40 feet long by 30 feet wide.

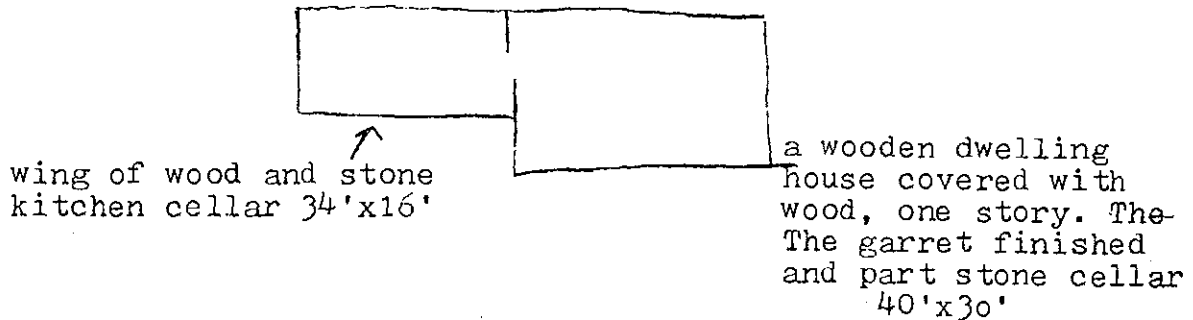


Wooden wing  
one story high  
34'x18'.

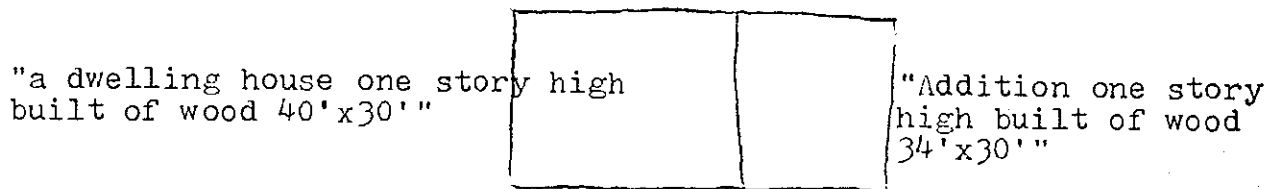


FOOTNOTES (cont'd)

4. Mutual Assurance Policy #1238 entered May 20, 1809.  
Policy was taken by Monroe on his "one dwelling...occupied by himself"



5. Mutual Assurance Policy #2270: November 5, 1816.  
"...as per declaration 1238... dwelling occupied by nobody."



BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Grigg, Milton, Personal Conversation, Charlottesville, Virginia, September, 1979.
- Grigg, Wood and Brown: Engineers and Architects, Restoration Folder on Ash Lawn.
- Rawlings, Mary, "Mr. Monroe and Albemarle", Tyler Quarterly, 1:2, October 1958.
- Wenger, Mark, Secretary's Road Survey; Ash Lawn, Building entry Yetter, George, #58, School of Architecture, University of Edwards, David, Virginia, 1977.
- Woods, Rev. Edgar, History of Albemarle County, The Green Bookman, Bridgewater, Virginia, 1932.
- National Register of Historic Places Inventory/Nomination Form: Ash Lawn.
- Policies of the Mutual Assurance Society, nos. 386, 1238, 2270, University of Virginia, Alderman Library, Manuscripts Room.

PART III: ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

## I. General Statement:

- A. Ash Lawn is an example of a late eighteenth century vernacular structure with mid and late nineteenth century additions to the west and north.
- B. Condition of the fabric: Good

## II. Exterior Description:

- A. Overall dimensions: The original part of the house is three bays long, three bays wide and one and a half stories high. The slope of the terrain creates an English basement on the west and south elevations. There is a small shed addition on the south-west corner of the original section.
- B. Foundations: Brick and rubble stone.
- C. Wall construction: Frame covered with painted weather-boards.
- D. Porches: The north porch on the original portion of the house has a gable roof that is supported by two piers (with lamb's tongue and chamfering) and two pilasters along the wall. (Note: This porch is a twentieth century addition.) A shed roof covers a small two story porch formed on the south elevation by the irregularities of the floor plan.
- E. Chimneys: A brick central chimney is in the original section of the house while a field stone chimney is located in the room that connects the original section of the house to the later wing. A large brick chimney rises above the doorway in the north addition.
- F. Openings:
  - 1. Doorways/Doors: The doorways on the north and south elevations of the older portion have molded trim. Six-paneled doors open into the house. There is a square-*rectangular* three light transom above the first floor doorway on the south side.
  - 2. Windows: In the original section some of the windows have molded trim while the other windows are plain. The windows are double hung and vary from 4 over 4 to 6 over 6 to 9 over 9 sash.
- G. Roof: The gable roof and its shed addition are covered with tin. While the connecting passage-parlor and original section share the same ridge line, their slopes differ.

### III. Interior Description:

- A. Floor Plan: The eastern addition is connected to the four room square section by a room that serves as both a passageway and parlor. The northern two rooms of this section represent a later addition to the house. The basement level consists of three rooms and two large storage type areas. The western most of these rooms probably served as a warming kitchen. In this room there is evidence that the northern wall has been moved to the south by 3'6".
- B. Staitway: A narrow enclosed exterior single run stair ascends from the south porch.
- C. Openings:
1. Doorways and doors: All the doorways have architrave trim and four paneled doors.
  2. Windows: All the windows are surrounded by architrave mouldings that date from different periods. The earliest of these profiles are found around the southern windows of the original cottage and connecting parlor. This moulding is also found around the windows of the north east room of the original portion of the house.
- D. Trim: Late eighteenth century chair rails are found in the two rooms of the original cottage. Baseboards are found throughout the house. A unique feature is the exterior cornice moulding that runs along the south wall of the north addition.
- E. Mantels: There are fireplaces in every room of the original section of the house. The styles of the mantles range from the elaborate Adamesque mantle found in the dining room to the more simple types consisting of shelf, plain frieze and pilasters.

### IV. Site:

- A. General Setting: The front of the old section of Ash Lawn faces north towards Monticello. The latest addition faces east with a long row of boxwood leading from it to the marble statue of Monroe.
- B. Outbuildings: A complex of three outbuildings stands south of the house. These include a gable roofed ice house, a gable roofed cabin with an exterior end chimney and a smokehouse with a pyrimidal roof.

PART III: PROJECT INFORMATION

This documentation was produced by the School of Architecture at the University of Virginia, under the direction of K. Edward Lay, Associate Professor of Architecture. It was undertaken by Stuart N. Siegel, Graduate Student in Architectural History and Glenn R. MacCullough, undergraduate student in Architecture, during 1980. The documentation was donated to the Historic American Buildings Survey. It was not produced under HABS supervision, nor edited by members of the HABS staff. Of particular assistance in the preparation of the Ashlawn documentation were Mr. Milton Grigg, F. A. I. A., Architect, and Ms. Carolyn Holmes, Curator of Ashlawn.